

## Easter IV: Sunday, May 8

Acts 9:36-43; Ps 23; Rev 7:9-17; Jn 10:22-30

*May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts,  
guide us along right pathways in Jesus' name. Amen.*

The Lord is my Shepherd.

It's a rather bold statement of faith that stirs up all sorts of powerful feelings for us, isn't it?

The Lord is my Shepherd.

It's a phrase that perhaps brings us back to the funeral of many dear souls, whose lives have nurtured us and helped us be the people God created us to be.

The Lord is my Shepherd.

It's a measure of comfort; one that so powerfully offers us care and compassion when we are wobbly or need reassurance.

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:  
he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me  
in the presence of mine enemies:  
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life:  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

These are such beautiful and soothing words; words that worth our hearing time and again, for they point us in the direction of who God is and how God acts.

The Psalm reminds us of God's steadfast presence throughout our lives, no matter what is happening with us, with our relationships, with our community, or with our world.

And there is always, oh so much happening.

The Psalmist knows that and directs us to God; that through it all – be it war or pandemic, grief or upset, sickness or tragedy, change or turmoil - God and God alone is our true safety, our true shepherd.

And we shall not want, if we put our trust – our whole trust: body, mind, and spirit – in God.

This was more or less the invitation that Jesus was making to the people who are celebrating Hannukah, of the Festival of the Dedication, in the Temple.

There a crowd encircles him and pointedly asks,  
“How long are you going to keep us guessing? If you're the Messiah, tell us straight out.”

We might imagine Jesus taking a deep breath before responding. He answers, “I told you, but you don't believe. Everything I have done has been authorized by my Father, actions that speak louder than words.”

And he goes on,... “You don't believe because you're not my sheep. My sheep recognize my voice. I know them, and they follow me. They trust me. And I give them real and eternal life and they are protected, always and forever.”

Actions speak louder than words, Jesus says.

Isn't that the truth.

It's certainly the truth for Tabitha and her friends. A good and faithful servant of the Lord, she is raised by Peter in a miraculous moment in Joppa. When Tabitha arose, and sat up, word of this extraordinary deed spread rapidly through the community, and many put their trust in the Lord.

Actions so often speak louder than words.

You see, the sheep know and trust the shepherd, not because they have gone through any sort of rational, intellectual discernment; sheep not the most intelligent creatures after all; but rather sheep know and trust the shepherd because they have experienced the shepherd and his ways, his works or deeds, as it were.

In the same way, a child knows and trusts their parents because of experience, not reason.

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Jesus elsewhere says, "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

In the verses just before the Gospel we heard proclaimed this morning, Jesus is referred to as the Good Shepherd.

“I am the Good Shepherd,” says Jesus. “I know my own sheep and my own sheep know me. In the same way, the Father knows me and I know the Father.”

The reference to this passage is why today is often known as Good Shepherd Sunday.

It’s a day that has traditionally been a day for intentional prayers for vocations to ordained ministry: deacons, priests, and bishops; as well as those whose vocation is to religious life: monks and nuns; there are several such orders in Canada and a few have been active in our diocese over the years, particularly in the last century.

Our metropolitan, Archbishop Anne Germond, who offers leadership to the seven Anglican dioceses that make up the Ecclesiastical province of Ontario has invited us to pray also for those discerning a call to ordained ministry,

“... that our Church, ‘under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may choose suitable persons for the ministry of word and sacrament’ and that we may uphold them in their work for the growth of God’s kingdom.”

May it be so.

In her pastoral letter Archbishop Anne also lifts up the ministry of the baptised.

“All are called to serve God according to the gifts God has given them for their particular context and we give thanks for the ministry of the baptized, praying that on Good Shepherd Sunday we will hear God’s call on our hearts in a fresh new way,” she writes.

May it also be so; may we hear God’s call on our hearts in a fresh new way, especially at this particular moment.

These past years have found us tested and tried, time and again. And we have been changed by this time of pandemic in ways that perhaps we are only beginning to understand.

And so we find ourselves, our Church, and our world in a liminal moment.

Some of the old ways have passed away, and some of the new ways have not yet emerged.

My hunch is that many of us, if not all of us, are still searching for answers, or at the very least trying to make meaning of all we have and continue to go through.

And it is into this moment, that we’re invited to listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Will you recognize his voice when he calls?

And more importantly, will you follow?

That’s invitation for us today.

Through this teaching at the Temple, Jesus is highlighting the importance of actions as a powerful testimony to faith; and our daily witness to the Way of Love can do just that, perhaps more powerfully than words, especially in these uncertain and challenging times,

To live with love the many and diverse vocations has called us to – be in the vocation of motherhood which we also celebrate this day – or the vocations of our daily labours, and of course our Christian vocation as disciples of Jesus.

That's the task: to love God and to love our neighbour in all the spaces and places of our lives.

For you see, the thing about sheep following the voice of the Shepherd, is that the herd is a potent visual cue to any lost sheep who have gone astray. You can much more easily pick out a blob of white on a hillside than you can a spec of white; and together the flock guides the lost sheep toward green pastures.

I wonder if as a Church we're not being urged to do the same; to listen and follow that still small voice of God as we are called to life and compelled to love, through the many and good works of compassion, justice and hospitality, and in so doing magnifying Jesus' witness by being a beacon of hope to the lost sheep in our communities.

And so, on this Good Shepherd Sunday, may we be reminded that the Lord is indeed our Shepherd; and may we follow with faith. Amen.

The Venerable Bill Mous  
*Archdeacon of Niagara*